

Alaska Faith-Based & Community Initiatives Task Force

Research Effort #2: *Learning From Effective FBCI-Government Collaborations*

April 30, 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objectives and Approach

The Alaska Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (FBCI) Task Force explored a number of current examples of collaborations between FBCIs and government agencies to develop an understanding of what makes such cooperative relationships productive and effective. This effort had a twofold objective:

1. Uncover key findings from studying successful FBCI-government partnerships
2. Develop policy recommendations that will help Alaska foster additional successful FBCI-government partnerships

The research that produced the findings and recommendations in this report included:

- Focused interviews with organizations nominated as excellent examples of FBCI/Government collaboration
- A review of the national literature on Charitable Choice
- Interviews conducted by Task Force members with a diverse group of FBCIs.

This effort has produced five key findings and five policy recommendations that the Task Force is currently discussing.

Key Findings

The Task Force's research into successful FBCI-government collaborations has led to five key findings:

1. Collaborations are especially successful when the FBCI *leverages* governmental services.

FBCIs cannot replace government services. At their best, FBCIs ***leverage*** government services to produce results that would be impossible for a government agency to deliver without the FBCI partnership.

We see a great example of this in Fairbanks, where *Love Inc.*'s transportation program is partnering with the state government to provide mothers and their children rides to work and child care every morning and evening. By using church volunteers with their own cars, *Love Inc.* can provide transportation far more cheaply than the state government could and provide enormous additional benefits as well. *Love Inc.* estimates that it provides 14,000 rides a year. If we make the conservative assumption that each cab ride would cost \$25.00, then *Love Inc.* has generated \$350,000 in value. The program costs *Love Inc.* \$45,000 to run. The financial leverage is over 7 dollars for every 1 dollar invested.

The social leverage in this example is harder to measure. But use common sense. Suppose a state agency had paid for vouchers for taxicab rides. Would a taxi cab driver be likely to provide the practical connections to people in the church who can fix some one's plumbing, or give the feeling of being cared about, loved and prayed over that the church volunteer has provided? No, the service being provided to

these mothers goes well beyond the value of a cab ride and would, in fact, cost the state far more than \$350,000 if it were to fully replicate it on its own.

The leverage from this partnership does not stop there, because the mothers and children aren't the only ones benefiting. The drivers are gaining from this program as well. Most of the drivers are retired people who now have a reason to get up and get going and who have the satisfaction of knowing they are making a difference. *Love Inc.* creates what sociologists call "social capital": The Fairbanks community becomes more of a community with people of diverse backgrounds getting connected up to each other in mutually fulfilling ways."

2. FBCIs are exceptionally well-positioned to fill voids in social services in Alaska, especially needs requiring human love, time, and spiritual and emotional care.

FBCIs are well suited to address two of the three service gaps identified by the Task Force's first research effort: 1) personalized services and 2) relational support. Developing time-consuming, long-term human relationships is an arena in which volunteers excel. A classic example is the Big Brother/Big Sister Program where scientific research has documented that the countless hours of love and care pay off in higher rates of high school graduation and lower rates of social problems.

3. At their best, FBCIs are flexible, fast on their feet, localized and entrepreneurial. They can develop a laser focus on a new need whereas government agencies are necessarily constrained by legislation and regulation.

The organizational cultures of government bureaucracies and FBCIs complement each other. Government agencies must follow law and regulation to ensure fairness and responsiveness to democratic decision-making. FBCIs, as private organizations, can use personal judgment in deciding what needs are pressing, what people will make good use of limited resources, and what new areas need immediate attention.

Our interviews are filled with examples of nimble action on the part of FBCIs. Take the Cross Roads Medical Center. One nurse practitioner felt "called" to provide improved medical care to residents along the Tok Cutoff. She practiced out of a small log cabin with no running water and an outdoor toilet while CRMC sought federal funding to create a permanent, well-equipped facility.

4. Our interviews revealed no examples of government interference with religion in FBCI/government collaborations, but did uncover latent fears and confusion about what is permitted under current law.

No faith-based organization we interviewed identified government interference with their religious activities and mission as a problem. Nonetheless, fears of religious interference persist on the part of faith-based organizations due to past experience in the period before charitable choice legislation was enacted. Although the 1996 welfare reform act has removed much of that actual basis for their concerns, faith-based organizations can still be reluctant to partner with government agencies for fear that they would have to unacceptably compromise their faith mission. Many FBCIs are unclear about what is now allowed under the charitable choice legislation. And confusion also exists on the part of government agencies, legislators, and the public as to the current state of the law.

5. In contrast, many FBCIs identified government red tape, slow payments, and burdensome reporting requirements as major obstacles to successful collaborations.

Many FBCIs are small and lack the personnel and expertise to meet government contract and grant requirements or the money to provide for insurance.

We have identified two organizational forms that deal effectively with these problems of scale and size: 1) National organizations like Salvation Army which can centralize grant-writing, accounting, and reporting functions; and 2) umbrella organizations, such as Love Inc, which pool resources from like-minded entities to achieve the scale necessary to hire the management and staff required to collaborate with the government.

Recommendations

We have a vision for collaboration between government and FBCIs

Think of government social service agencies (bureaucracies responsive to law) and FBCIs (private organizations responsive to faith and compassion) as two very different organizational forms. Each organizational form has its own distinctive strengths and weaknesses. FBCIs, for example, excel at human relationships, a weakness of government agencies. On the other hand, government agencies offer stability, a weakness of FBCIs staffed largely by volunteers.

Imagine each organizational form as a jagged half-circle. Alone, government agencies and FBCIs are like two incomplete, jagged half-circles. When government agencies and FBCIs collaborate in an effective partnership, the two jagged half circles come together, creating a wheel. And the wheel, as we all know, was the invention that made civilization possible!

In this spirit, we offer five recommendations:

1. The state of Alaska should develop small leverage grants, in the \$5,000 to \$20,000 range, to encourage FBCIs to collaborate with government programs.

These incentive grants would be designed to require a minimum of paperwork. They would be awarded for collaborations that leverage the effectiveness of government programs and fill human service gaps.

2. The state of Alaska should give further attention to legislation that enables FBCIs to deal with various insurance-related barriers.

The Legislature has recognized insurance as a key issue preventing FBCIs from contributing all that they can to Alaska's social service network and several bills have been proposed to deal with it. We recognize that the insurance issues FBCIs face are complex and challenging, ranging from the prohibitive cost of employee health coverage to the unavailability of liability policies for some volunteer organizations. Nevertheless, solving these insurance barriers will greatly increase the ability of FBCIs to make their unique contributions to Alaska's social service needs.

3. In awarding substantial state contracts and grants, federal and state agencies should pay even greater attention to organizational efficiency.

While some organizations pride themselves on getting the most from their money, other organizations appeared to be less concerned with cost effectiveness and to have organizational redundancies. The

state's ability to accurately assess the efficiency of government grant spending by an FBCI would be enhanced if the current approach of relying almost exclusively on paper-based accounting processes was buttressed by more hands-on assessments by trained personnel. In addition to assuring there is no flagrant waste occurring, these personnel could help FBCIs identify opportunities for efficiency gains that may otherwise elude their attention.

4. The state of Alaska should encourage experienced FBCIs to mentor their less experienced counterparts.

A common theme in our interviews was the maturing of FBCIs as they moved from a single focus on their mission to a dual focus on both their mission and also on management techniques (such as maintaining cash reserves to tide over the organization in times of slow payment or cutbacks). In short, there is no substitute for experience. Unfortunately, most FBCIs must go through the slow and painful maturation process without the benefit of learning from those who have preceded them. The state should actively work to connect experienced FBCI organizations in mentoring relationships with their less experienced colleagues.

5. The state of Alaska should develop an Office for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

The findings from this research effort strongly support the creation of a permanent Alaskan Office for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, as a number of other states have done. Among other things, this office would:

- Facilitate mentoring relationships among FBCI organizations
- Communicate what is permitted in FBCI-government partnerships under the current charitable choice legislation
- Develop and oversee small leverage grants
- Provide policymakers with information and recommendations on issues concerning FBCIs
- Foster improved communication and collaboration between and among FBCIs and state agencies
- Encourage new FBCI contributions to Alaska's social service network
- Help FBCIs focus on the areas of need to which they can most contribute
- Build trust on all sides

Our short-term Task Force can point the way, but successful collaboration is a long-term journey best facilitated by a permanent office. We encourage the Task Force to work closely with the Department of Health and Social Services and develop a plan for creating Alaska's own FBCI office, focusing in particular on its structure, responsibilities, costs and funding, and measurable objectives.